## CHAPTER XXXV: COMEBACK

HOW FARE YOU?

MY LADY OCTAVIA...

TELL ME ROXXANE...

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IF YOU WISH FOR SILENCE, THEN I CAN STOP WITH THE MUSIC.

IT WOULD SEEM AS IF YOU ARE NOT IN THE BEST OF MOODS.

WHAT SHOULD ONE THINK ABOUT SUCH THINGS?

PEOPLE SHOULD USE THEIR LIVES FOR.

AND WHAT IS IT THAT...

WHAT IS IT...

I AM WORRIED...

RECENTLY I HAVE BEGUN TO WONDER AS TO WHY I AM EVEN HERE...

THAT'S A DECEIVINGLY DEEP...

AGAIN WITH THE...

RATHER PHILO-SOPHICAL ENQUIRIES EH.

AND DIFFICULT QUESTION YOU HAVE THERE.

THAT PEOPLE LIVE FOR...?

AND IT IS FOR SUCH A BIRTH THAT...

SO MANY PEOPLE NOW WAIT UPON ME, AND TREAT ME AS IMPORTANT...

BY CHANCE I WAS BORN THE DAUGHTER OF THE EMPEROR...

IT WAS THUS NATURAL FOR ME TO BECOME THE NEXT EMPEROR'S CONSORT.

IT SEEMS AS THOUGH I MYSELF AM UNIMPORTANT.

YET IF THE ONLY IMPORTANT THING IS MY MARRIAGE...

I FEEL UNBEARABLY SAD AND LONELY.

I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT I SHOULD DO.

IT DOES NOT SEEM AS IF ANYONE TRULY NEEDS ME...

THAT I...

CANNOT DO A THING.

HER PARENTS HAD DECIDED HER PARTNER TO BE LUCIUS JUNIUS SILANUS, A YOUNG NOBLE FROM A NOTEWORTHY FAMILY.

FROM THE AGE OF TWO OCTAVIA WAS ALREADY BETROTHED.

IT IS SAID THAT CLAUDIUS TOOK AGRIPPINA AS HIS NEXT WIFE ON THE VERY SAME DAY.

SILANUS WAS CAUGHT IN AN INGENIUS TRAP, AND THE BETROTHAL BROKEN OFF. HE WOULD THEN COMMIT SUICIDE AT THE AGE OF 17.

THAT BETROTHAL HOWEVER WAS CRUSHED BY AGRIPPINA, WHO HAD HER SIGHTS SET UPON BECOMING THE SUCCESOR TO THE EMPRESS.

STILL A MERE 14 YEARS OLD, NERO WOULD BE FORCED INTO TAKING HIS COMING OF AGE CEREMONY, AND THEN MARRYING, ALL ACCORDING TO HIS MOTHER'S DESIGNS.

BURNING WITH AMBITION TO BRING BOTH HERSELF AND HER CHILD INTO IMPERIAL POWER, THE SHREWD WOMAN DEALT WITH ANY WOULD BE HINDERANCES WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY TACT.

THUS THEY BECAME A RATHER IRREGULAR COUPLE, EVEN IF IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL FOR A 15 YEAR OLD AND A 13 YEAR OLD TO BE MARRIED AT THE TIME.

NERO WAS UNABLE TO DISOBEY HIS WISE, YET DETERMINED MOTHER.

IN OTHER WORDS YOU'RE ASKING...

HOW IS ONE MEANT TO USE THEIR RATHER LIMITED LIFE?

JUST WHY DO WE LIVE YOU SAY...

I WAS TAUGHT THAT IT IS A LIFELONG PROBLEM.

ONE SHOULD DO SO BY CONTINUING TO ASK CONTRARY QUESTIONS ABOUT ONESELF.

ONE'S PURPOSE SHOULD BE CONFIRMED THROUGHOUT ONE'S LIFE...

THAT IS TO SAY, YOUR PURPOSE.

THAT'S STILL QUITE LOVELY.

I AM TRULY ENVIOUS.

BESIDES, YOU ARE YOUNG.

WHEN YOU'RE LOST, OR CONFUSED, YOU CAN STILL COME TO THE TRUTH.

SO THEN, EVEN WHEN YOU'RE CONFUSED, YOU CONTINUE TO ASK QUESTIONS OF YOURSELF?

AS IS, I AM BARELY ABLE MAKE A SUCCESS OF THINGS WITH MY OWN SKILLS.

IT'S SOMEWHAT EMBARASSING, BUT I STILL HAVE MUCH LEFT MYSELF.

THERE ARE LIKELY AS MANY ANSWERS TO SUCH A QUESTION AS THERE ARE PEOPLE...

ONE NEEDN'T NECESSARILY HOLD CONVICTIONS OR ACCOMPLISH GREAT FEATS, RATHER EACH PATH HAS ITS OWN ANSWER.

YOUR MAJESTY!

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I'M NOT INTERRUPTING AM I?

YOU NEEDN'T SHOW ME ANY CONCERN.

STAY AS YOU WERE.

...

YET YOU ARE STILL SO YOUNG AND INNOCENT...

YOU ARE ONLY 14 CORRECT?

I WISHED TO HAVE A NICE, CALM DISCUSSION WITH YOU ABOUT SOMETHING ANYWAY.

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SO...

HOW ARE THINGS?

IS NERO IMPRESSIVE ENOUGH?

WHEN I WAS AROUND 13.

I BECAME A WIFE...

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I... I AM MOST SORRY.

YOU NEEDN'T MAKE SUCH A SURPRISED FACE.

EVEN I HAD SOMEWHAT ROMANTIC DREAMS WHEN I WAS THAT OLD.

NOW IF YOU WOULD EXCUSE ME...

MY LORD NERO TREATS ME WITH UTMOST KIDNESS.

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I'M QUITE CONCERNED.

HE'S STILL JUST A CHILD, SO DOES HE MAKE SURE TO LOVE YOU PROPERLY?

YOU ARE STILL A VIRGIN ARE YOU NOT!

THAT IS A LIE!

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YOU'LL BE ENTERING YOUR THIRD YEAR OF MARRIAGE SOON ENOUGH... IT IS QUITE A VEXING MATTER!

IT... IT IS JUST THAT I...

I AM MOST SORRY, I NEVER MEANT TO LIE...

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ARE YOU AFRAID OF A MAN TOUCHING YOUR BODY?!

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YOUR MAJESTY!

AND THEN...

BECOME A MOTHER, AND THINGS WILL BE THREE TIMES AS AMUSING.

YOU'RE A TIMID CHILD AREN'T YOU.

BECOME A WOMAN, AND YOUR PLEASURES WILL DOUBLE.

...

WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO KNOW?

EH!

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VERY WELL.

WHY DON'T I FIRST...

P...

AH!

PLEASE, STOP THIS!

WHAT DO WE DO?

HAH, UH...

SHALL I TEACH YOU, OCTAVIA?

AH, MY STOMACH HURTS.

I WAS JUST MESSING AROUND WITH YOU.

I WANTED TO TRY AND TEASE YOU A LITTLE TO SEE IF YOU'D CRY.

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IT WAS A JOOOKE. AHAHAHA...

JUUUST KIDDING.

...

HUH...

THIS REAC-TION?

WHAT'S WITH...

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YOU GO TOO FAR WITH YOUR HUMOUR MY LADY!

IT'S NO WONDER NERO WON'T EMBRACE YOU.

YOU REAAALLY ARE A TEDIUS GIRL...

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MARRIAGE IS NOT THE SAME AS "PLAYING HOUSE"!

LISTEN TO ME OCTAVIA.

WHEN DID I ASK FOR YOUR OPINION?

SILENCE ROXXANE!

...

YOU CANNOT STAY AS A CHILD FOREVER!

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IS IT NOT A WONDERFUL THING, BEING ABLE TO WATCH FROM A WHOLE OTHER PLACE, WHILE INDULGING IN DELICIOUS DISHES...

AND THE FINEST OF WINES.

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE ABLE TO OBSERVE A MATCH FROM THIS SPECIAL SEAT?

WELL CESVTS?

WHAT SORT OF FREEDOM IS THIS?!

ジャラ…

FEEL THAT WAY.

I CANNOT...

IT IS NATURAL THAT ONE PRIORITIZES THEIR OWN WELLBEING.

JUST TRY AND ENJOY YOUR FREEDOM.

GO ON, ADMIT IT.

YOU'RE NOT BEING TRUTHFUL NOW ARE YOU.

HM.

LOVE TO WATCH SUCH BLOODY SPECTACLES.

STILL, WHY IS IT THAT THE MASSES...

DID YOU KNOW, TWO GENERATIONS BEFORE ME THE EMPEROR CALIGULA...

WOULD HAVE THOSE FROM THE AUDIENCE WHOM HE WAS DISPLEASED WITH FIGHT ANIMALS.

I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH THEY'RE BETTING BUT...

IT'S TRULY ABJECT.

LOOK AT THEM.

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WHAT'S WITH THEIR STUPID FACES?

IT SEEMS YOU'VE CHANGED, MY LORD NERO.

WHO KNOWS WHAT SORT OF FACES THEY'D MAKE?!

I SHOULD DO THE SAME AND THROW THOSE IDIOTS BEFORE THE FIGHTERS!

IT'D CERTAINLY MAKE ME LAUGH, UNLIKE THIS POOR SHOW!

RUSKA'S MATCH...!

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IF IT'S RUSKA THEN ONE MAY WELL HOPE FOR SOMETHING A BIT MORE ARTISTIC!

YOUR MAJESTY. THE NEXT MATCH SHALL BE RUSKA'S RETURN FIGHT.

WHERE IS YOUR FIGHTING GOING TO TAKE YOU, RUSKA?!

THUMP.

IF SO THEN WHY IS HE FIGHTING?

WHO IS HE FIGHTING FOR?

RUSKA HAS RETURNED TO THE ARENA!

HE'S RETURNED...

THUMP.

THUMP.

HAS HE GOTTEN OVER VALERIA'S DEATH?

OOH.

IS IT NOW!

HE'S BLACK?!

HE'S PITCH BLACK!

SO HE INTENDS TO FIGHT WHILE DRESSED IN MOURNING!

THE FIGHTERS HAVE ENTERED!

A PUPIL OF THE PANKRATION LEGION, AND A THIRD RANKED MEMBER OF THE PRAETORIAN GUARD!

I'M OFF.

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ROME'S YOUNG LION!

VALERIA!

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GOLDEN RUSKA!

THE BLACK SCORPION OF THE BURNING SANDS, MABEIRO!

IS AN ARABIAN EXECUTIONER!

HIS OPPO-NENT...

SWISH.

SWISH.

"I BELIEVE I WILL BEAR A GRUDGE AGAINST BOXING SLAVES FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE..."

HE'S A BOXING SLAVE WITH OVER 90 WINS.

FOUL MOOD?!

WHAT'S WITH THIS...

HE LOOKS STRONG!

FIGHTERS, TO THE CENTRE!

I'LL BURY HIM WITH A SINGLE BLOW!

HE'S JUST SOME NERVOUS KID.

BEGIN!

FU!

GTAB.

HE LEAPT AT HIS STRIKE!

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IT'S BEEN DECIDED.

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SILENCE...

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SILENCE...

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SHUT IT, SLAVE BOXER!

SILENCE...

SI-LENCE...

SI-LENCE...

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IT'S SILENT...

I CAN'T HEAR A THING...

WHY CAN I FEEL NOTHING BUT THIS PULSING.

THUMP.

THUMP.

THUMP.

THUMP.

THUMP.

THUMP.

WHY?!

I KILLED SOMEONE WITH MY OWN HANDS.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE...

ALREADY BEEN BROKEN?

HAS MY SPIRIT...

VALERIA!

CHAPTER XXXV: COMEBACK - END